

NEWS

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NDDOT launches Crash Memorial web page to kick off Labor Day DUI Crackdown *Extra patrols August 21 – September 7*

Bismarck – Today, the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) was joined by several families who lost loved ones due to motor vehicle crashes in North Dakota for the launch of the Crash Memorial web page. Each year, hundreds of families are affected by the loss of loved ones and the Crash Memorial web page is a way to memorialize and share the stories of family members.

The launch of the Crash Memorial web page is in conjunction with the *Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over* impaired driving crackdown as so many of these tragedies are due to choices made by a driver. Each year at this time, heavy recreational travel takes place due to the Labor Day holiday. That's why today starts the 18 day blitz of the most active traffic enforcement periods of the year.

"The influence of alcohol, drugs or medication is one of the main contributing factors in fatal crashes in North Dakota," said Mark Nelson, deputy director for Driver and Vehicle Services for NDDOT. "We all have a stake in getting impaired drivers off our roads. The NDDOT's main mission is about safety on our roadways, with that in mind, the Department is launching an interactive Crash Memorial web page with a personal perspective for families who have been affected by crashes."

Today the family members who came to voice their support for DUI prevention were among the first to create a memorial for their loved ones on the new motor vehicle Crash Memorial web page – an additional page on the traffic safety-based *Code for the Road* website. The Crash Memorial web page will allow memorials to be created for all types of motor vehicle crashes on North Dakota roads. To write a memorial or visit the site, go to the NDDOT website at www.dot.nd.gov or *Code for the Road* website at ndcodefortheroad.org/memorial.

"With the extra impaired driving enforcement occurring over the Labor Day weekend, we focus on the memorials of these families here today on the Crash Memorial web page. These memorials help give family and friends a way to help educate people on the terrible impact drinking and driving has," says Karin Mongeon, director of the Safety Division at NDDOT.

One goal of the interactive page is to encourage citizens to participate in the fight against impaired driving or advocate for other safety issues. Lynn Mickelson is an example of a citizen-advocate who faces down his own grief to speak out against drinking and driving.

"Drunk driving crashes like the one that killed my daughter and her family can be prevented. That's what makes their deaths even more heartbreaking," said Lynn Mickelson, whose daughter, son-in-law

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and granddaughter were hit head-on by a repeat alcohol offender driving the wrong way on I-94 near Jamestown in the summer of 2012. The family was remembered at the event in Bismarck by both sets of parents of the young couple. The memorials for Allison, Aaron and Brielle Deutscher were the first to be added to the Crash Memorial web page.

“As this Crash Memorial web page states, every life is precious, and even one life lost is too many,” Tom Deutscher said. Last year, nearly half of all motor vehicle fatalities in North Dakota were alcohol-related.

Bismarck flight paramedic Corey Nelson also spoke, remembering his 20-year-old brother, Kyle, who was a passenger in a pickup driven by an impaired driver when he was killed in November of 2014. Their mother Yvonne was among the first responders to the crash scene on a rural road near Geneseo in southeast North Dakota.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, high-visibility enforcement can reduce DUI fatalities by up to 20 percent.

“Law enforcement can only do so much, as hard as we try,” said Sgt. Luke Gardiner, Traffic Section supervisor for the Bismarck Police Department. “The public can help by making sure friends and family don’t ride with a driver who has been drinking. Let people know that you don’t think drinking and driving is an acceptable risk—and if you see an impaired driver, call 911.”

Funding for additional traffic safety enforcement is provided by federal grant money distributed through the NDDOT. Learn more about traffic safety initiatives at ndcodefortheroad.org or join the conversation on the *Code for the Road* Facebook or Twitter page.

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